

Purdue Pharma, U.S. states agree to new opioid settlement

By GEOFF MULVIHILL and JOHN SEEWER

Associated Press

Purdue Pharma reached a nationwide settlement Thursday over its role in the opioid crisis, with the Sackler family members who own the company boosting their cash contribution to as much as \$6 billion in a deal intended to staunch a flood of lawsuits facing the maker of OxyContin.

The deal follows an earlier settlement that had been appealed by eight states and the District of Columbia. They agreed to sign on after the Sacklers kicked in more cash and accepted other terms. In exchange, the family would be protected from civil lawsuits.

In all, the plan could be worth more than \$10 billion over time. It calls for members of the Sackler family to give up control of the Stamford, Connecticut-based company so it can be turned into a new entity with profits used to fight the crisis. The deal would not shield members of the family from criminal charges, although there's no indication any are forthcoming. Sackler family members have not unequivocally offered an apology but issued a statement of regret about the toll of OxyContin, its signature painkiller, which users learned could be manipulated to produce quick highs.

Continued on next page

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Purdue Pharma's headquarters stands in Stamford, Conn., on Oct. 21, 2020.

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Continued from Front

Purdue Pharma had promoted its use for a broad range of pain issues for which doctors previously had shied away from prescribing opioids.

"While the families have acted lawfully in all respects, they sincerely regret that OxyContin, a prescription medicine that continues to help people suffering from chronic pain, unexpectedly became part of an opioid crisis that has brought grief and loss to far too many families and communities," said the statement from the Sackler family.

Under the settlement, victims also are to have a forum in court, by video-conference scheduled for March 9, to address some of the Sacklers. That's something they have not been able to do previously in a public setting.

The settlement is outlined in a report filed in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in White Plains, New York, and must be approved by the judge. It was hammered out with attorneys general from the eight states — California, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington — and D.C. who had opposed the earlier one, arguing that it did not properly hold Sackler family members accountable.

Several parents whose children became addicted to opioids said they were ambivalent — glad that more money will be available for addiction treatment, but upset that the Sacklers will remain wealthy and escape more accountability. Connecticut's Paige Niver, whose daughter became addicted following a bicycle accident when she was 14 and remains in recovery about 13 years later, said she didn't want other families to endure what hers did.

"As a mother, I did what the



Liz Fitzgerald of Southington, left, and Paige Niver of Manchester, right, listen as Connecticut Attorney General William Tong, center, speaks at a news conference, Thursday, March 3, 2022, in Hartford, Conn.

Associated Press

doctor told me to do and I just kept giving them to her. And when they were starting to have kind of a lesser effect, they say, 'Oh, then you need to give her more.' And that's exactly what I did," she said at a news conference Thursday with her state's attorney general.

"I never thought I'd see any justice for it, so the money will do so much good — fund as much treatment and prevention as possible," Niver said.

Ed Bisch, whose 18-year-old son died of an overdose 20 years ago, is glad states pushed Sackler family members to pay more. Still, he called the settlement "a horrible deal" because so many parents who buried loved ones won't see money, while the Sacklers retain their wealth.

"Guess what? They still made billions and billions of dollars," said Bisch, of Westampton, New Jersey. "Without any jail time, where is the deterrent? We've lost two generations

to their greed." Individual victims and their survivors are to share a \$750 million fund, a key provision not found in other opioid settlements. About 149,000 people made claims in advance and could qualify for shares from the fund.

That amount is unchanged in the new plan, but states will be able to create funds they can use to compensate victims beyond that, if they choose.

Other new provisions include an agreement from Sackler family members that they won't fight when institutions attempt to take their names off buildings funded by the family's support. And additional company documents are to be made public.

Most of the the money is to flow to state and local governments, Native American tribes, and some hospitals, with the requirement that it be used to battle an opioid crisis that has been linked to more than 500,000 deaths in the U.S. over the past two decades.

"We're pleased with the settlement achieved in mediation, under which all of the additional settlement funds will be used for opioid abatement programs, overdose rescue medicines, and victims," Purdue Pharma said in a statement issued separately from the family's. "With this mediation result, we continue on track to proceed through the appeals process on an expedited schedule, and we hope to swiftly deliver these resources."

Kentucky and Oklahoma are not part of the deal because they both reached previous settlements with Purdue.

Purdue, the originator of time-release versions of powerful prescription painkillers, is the highest-profile company out of many that have faced lawsuits over the crisis. It has twice pleaded guilty to criminal charges related to its business practices around OxyContin.

The latest announcement follows another landmark settlement late last week, when drugmaker Johnson & Johnson and three distributors finalized a settlement that will send \$26 billion over time to virtually every state and local governments throughout the U.S. There are two key differences between the the lat-

est Purdue settlement and the previous one struck last year. The Sacklers' cash contribution has gone up by at least \$1.2 billion, and state attorneys general and the District of Columbia have now agreed.

The money is to begin flowing after Purdue, which is to be renamed Knoa Pharma, emerges from bankruptcy. It's not clear when that will be. The last payment under the settlement is not scheduled to be made until 2039. Last year, the eight states and D.C. refused to sign on, and then most of them appealed after the deal was approved by the bankruptcy judge.

In December, a U.S. district judge sided with the nine holdouts. The judge, Colleen McMahon, rejected the settlement with a finding that bankruptcy judges lack the authority to grant legal protection to people who don't themselves file for bankruptcy when some parties disagree.

Purdue appealed that decision, which, if left standing, could have scuttled a common method of reaching settlements in sweeping, complicated lawsuits.

The attorneys general who have signed on are dropping from the main legal battle but are still free to write briefs to tell courts not to allow the protections for people who do not file for bankruptcy themselves.

Connecticut Attorney General William Tong has repeatedly said he has felt a "special obligation to be aggressive" in the case because Purdue is headquartered in the state. He expressed some disappointment Thursday with the final settlement, even though he said it was 40% more than the previous one.

"I wanted more. I still want more. But I took it as far as I could take it," he said during a news conference. "If we were to continue, we would do it alone and that is untenable."

The new settlement requires approval from U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Robert Drain. Appeals related to the previous version of the plan could continue moving through the court system. □

High court sides with government in Gitmo state secrets case

By JESSICA GRESKO

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court sided with the government Thursday and dismissed a case involving a Guantanamo Bay detainee captured after the Sept. 11 attacks and tortured by the CIA abroad who has sought information about his treatment. The United States insisted that the information Abu Zubaydah sought must remain secret even though much has been widely reported. Zubaydah, who was seized in Pakistan in 2002, was once thought to be a high-ranking member of the al-Qaida terrorist group that carried out the 2001 attacks. He was tortured while being held at so-called CIA black sites abroad before being transferred to Guantanamo in 2006.

Zubaydah was seeking to get the testimony of two former CIA contractors as part of an investigation into his treatment in Poland, where it has been widely reported he was once held. But six justices agreed his case should be thrown out.

Justice Stephen Breyer wrote for the majority that the government had ar-



In this photo reviewed by U.S. military officials, the sun sets behind the closed Camp X-Ray detention facility, on April 17, 2019, in Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba.

Associated Press

gued "Zubaydah's discovery request could force former CIA contractors to confirm the location of the detention site and that confirmation would itself significantly harm national security interests."

"In our view, the Government has provided sufficient support for its claim of harm to warrant application" of the so-called state secrets privilege, he said.

Many details about Zubaydah's treatment have been reported, including that

he was held in Thailand and Poland. The U.S. has allowed the disclosure of some information about his treatment. According to a 2014 Senate report, among other things Zubaydah was waterboarded more than 80 times and spent over 11 days in a coffin-size confinement box. Such techniques are now widely viewed as torture.

The U.S. has stopped short of acknowledging the locations of the black sites set up after 9/11 to gather

intelligence about terrorist plots against Americans. The government has cited national security and its commitments to foreign partners.

Conservative Justice Neil Gorsuch, writing in a dissent for himself and liberal Justice Sonia Sotomayor, said Zubaydah's detention in Poland is no secret. Nothing in the case "suggests that requiring the government to acknowledge what the world already knows to be true" would endanger na-

tional security, he wrote. "What was once a secret can, with the passage of time, become old news."

Gorsuch noted that the events about which Zubaydah was seeking information had taken place two decades ago and have "long been declassified."

"Official reports have been published, books written, and movies made about them. Still, the government seeks to have this suit dismissed on the ground it implicates a state secret — and today the Court acquiesces in that request. Ending this suit may shield the government from some further modest measure of embarrassment. But respectfully, we should not pretend it will safeguard any secret," Gorsuch wrote. Justice Elena Kagan agreed with the government that the former CIA contractors should be blocked from testifying about the location where Zubaydah was detained. But Kagan said a lower court could protect "classified information about location while giving Zubaydah access to unclassified information about detention conditions and interrogation methods." □

Peace Corps plans to start sending volunteers overseas again

By LISA RATHKE
Associated Press

The Peace Corps will start sending volunteers overseas again in mid-March after it evacuated them from posts around the world two years ago due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. government program announced Thursday.

An initial group of new volunteers and those who were evacuated in March 2020 as the coronavirus began to spread across the globe will go to Zambia and the Dominican Republic this month, according to a Peace Corps statement. The Peace Corps plans to return volunteers to their posts throughout the year, based on the number of COVID-19 cases and hospital capacity in the host country and the Peace Corps' ability to transport vol-

unteers to medical evacuation centers if there's an emergency. It is currently recruiting for 24 posts. Besides their primary work on local issues, volunteers will be involved in COVID-19 response and recovery, the Peace Corps said. In Zambia, volunteers will coordinate with local leaders and partner ministries to provide COVID-19 education and promote access to vaccinations for communities, officials said. In the Dominican Republic, the focus will be on helping communities overcome issues exacerbated by the pandemic, such as increased school dropout rates, literacy skills and preparing young adults for work. The Peace Corps marks its 61st anniversary this week. Two years ago, it had 7,000 volunteers in 62 countries,

when they were evacuated and sent back to the United States.

"Over the past two years, our primary goal has been to return volunteers to the more than 60 countries that are enthusiastically awaiting their return. And, we have weathered the waves and variants of the COVID-19 situation at each post and reengineered Peace Corps systems, policies, and procedures to align with today's reality," Peace Corps CEO Carol Spahn said.

Since those evacuations, the Peace Corps has used volunteers to help with the COVID-19 response domestically and developed a virtual service pilot program. Not before March 2020 had the organization founded by President John F. Kennedy needed to evacuate all



Cameron Beach, carries a bucket of water on her head collected from a communal borehole in Dedza, near Li-longwe, Malawi, on July 23, 2021.

Associated Press

its volunteers at the same time.

More than 240,000 Americans have served as Peace Corps volunteers in scores of countries since the program was created in 1961. The aim is to help the countries meet their develop-

ment needs through a variety of programs — from education to health and agriculture programs — while helping promote a better understanding of Americans. Typical service lasts two years after a training period. □

Ten hospitalized, several missing in Md. apartment explosion

SILVER SPRING, Md. (AP)

— Ten people were taken to hospitals and several remain unaccounted for following an explosion and fire at a Maryland apartment building Thursday morning, authorities said.

Firefighters responded to the Friendly Garden Apartments in Silver Spring, just outside Washington, D.C., about 10:30 a.m.

Video footage from a nearby resident's outdoor security camera shows an explosion obliterating an end unit of one building.

Steven Inman was cooking in a nearby apartment when he heard the blast.

"We heard the bang, loud shake. I see that the building is gone. My father yells out to me and I was already running over here," he said.

Inman said he helped a woman and her small child get out of the building found another woman with third-degree burns over much of her body.

Montgomery County Fire and Rescue Service Chief Scott Goldstein said 10 people were taken to the hospital, three with serious injuries.

"We do have several unaccounted for. I do not have



Charred rubble is seen after an apartment building collapsed after an explosion this morning in Silver Spring, Md., Thursday, March 3, 2022.

Associated Press

a number to provide you at this point," Goldstein said at an afternoon news conference.

"Our focus is to remain here until everybody is accounted for," he added.

The building that exploded, as well as those immediately adjacent to and across from it, have been declared unsafe to reoccupy. The three buildings are home to roughly 100 people, Goldstein said.

Goldstein said there were "possible indications of alerts" by search dogs, which could indicate bodies or survivors could be in the rubble of the exploded building. Crews will need to bring in heavy machinery to remove an unstable freestanding wall in order to facilitate the search, he said.

Video from the scene showed flames shooting from the roof of a building

and debris scattered on the ground.

Goldstein indicated that most of the flames had been extinguished by Thursday afternoon.

Authorities were hoping to escort residents back into the buildings that have been declared unsafe later Thursday so that they could retrieve belongings before being taken to shelter or hotels, and to allow residents to reoccupy three

other buildings.

"It's kind of scary looking at the extent of the explosion and it's hard not to imagine the impact it's had on people," said Montgomery County Executive Marc Elrich. "It's definitely a tough day."

Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan tweeted that his team has been in contact with county officials about the explosion, and that the state fire marshal, state police and state emergency management officials were offering their support.

Authorities have yet to determine the exact origin or cause of the blast, but Goldstein said there had been no prior 911 calls regarding the odor of gas or a gas leak on the block since at least Jan. 1 of last year.

Washington Gas, a utility that serves the area, said it was aware of the incident and that its personnel were assisting the fire department.

"As always, the safety of our customers and community is our top priority," the company said in a statement. "We are supporting the active investigation and do not have further details to share at this time." □

Popular hard seltzers to be scarcer in Utah under new law



A can of Coors Seltzer Mango, center, is shown with Vizzy Blueberry Pomegranate, left, and Vizzy Pineapple Mango, in front of the Utah State Capitol, Thursday, Feb. 17, 2022, in Salt Lake City.

Associated Press

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Hard seltzer drinkers in Utah will likely have their choices on grocery store shelves cut in half under legislation

that passed the Legislature Thursday in the latest update to strict alcohol laws in the state that's home to the alcohol-eschewing Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

Saints.

The clampdown is aimed at drinks containing commonly used food flavorings that contain trace amounts of ethyl alcohol, making certain seltzer flavors technically illegal to sell in Utah grocery and convenience stores. The final state Senate vote was 19-8. Up to 39 of the 80 approved types of hard seltzers — including some made by well-known brands like Truly, Coors and Bud Light — would likely have to go, as well as hard kombuchas.

The bill must still be signed by Republican Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, who said last month that he has no plans to veto it.

The impact could be serious for businesses like Salt Lake City-based M&M Distributing, which distributes

drinks including hard seltzer brands to retailers, said Shanna Clay, a representative for the company.

"These represent kind of irreplaceable losses to our company as well as threatening jobs," she said during a recent legislative hearing.

Lawmakers have said stores would be given six months to comply, softening the impact of the changes, and House sponsor Republican Rep. Steve Waldrip said negotiations will continue on ways to return products to retail shelves.

"We will address this issue with seltzers, but in the meantime we have to comply with our laws," Waldrip said last week.

Under the new law, the seltzers could still be sold in state-owned liquor stores,

which are the only legal outlets for wine and spirits in Utah. But limited shelf space means that some varieties could disappear from the state altogether. Hard seltzers have experienced massive growth in the U.S. recently as customers seek booze with less sugar and calories.

While many US states have complex alcohol regulations, Utah tends to set especially strict laws, like the lowest DUI threshold in the nation.

Most lawmakers are members of the state's predominant religious faith, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which is widely known as Mormon and teaches abstinence from alcohol. The faith has declined to comment on the latest legislation. □

ICC prosecutor launches Ukraine war crimes investigation

THE HAGUE, Netherlands

(AP) — The International Criminal Court prosecutor has launched an investigation that could target senior officials believed responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide amid a rising civilian death toll and widespread destruction of property during Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan announced the probe late Wednesday night after dozens of the court's member states asked him to take action.

"An investigation by the International Criminal Court into Russia's barbaric acts is urgently needed and it is right that those responsible are held to account," British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said. "The U.K. will work closely with allies to ensure justice is done."

After informing the court's judges of his decision to open an investigation that covers all sides in the conflict, Khan said: "Our work in the collection of evidence has now commenced."

Ukraine's State Emergency Service has said that more than 2,000 civilians have died since the Russian invasion, a claim that was impossible to verify.



A view of the exterior view of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands, Wednesday, March 31, 2021.

Associated Press

There also have been reports of the use by Russian troops of cluster bombs, with a preschool and a hospital both reportedly hit. President Vladimir Putin's "military machine is targeting civilians indiscriminately and tearing through towns across Ukraine," Truss said. Rights groups on Thursday welcomed the nations' request for an investigation. "The request for an ICC investigation reflects the

growing alarm among countries about the escalating atrocities and human rights crisis that has gripped Ukraine," said Balkees Jarrah, interim international justice director at Human Rights Watch. "These governments are making clear that serious crimes will not be tolerated and that the court has an essential role to play in ensuring justice." The court already has conducted a preliminary probe

into crimes linked to the violent suppression of pro-European protests in Kyiv in 2013-2014 by a pro-Russia Ukrainian administration and allegations of crimes in the Crimean Peninsula, which Russia annexed in 2014, and eastern Ukraine, where Moscow has backed rebels since 2014. It found "a broad range of conduct constituting war crimes and crimes against humanity within the jurisdiction of the

court have been committed" in Ukraine, Khan's predecessor, Fatou Bensouda, said at the time.

Those findings also will be included in Khan's investigation.

Putin and his military top brass could potentially face charges for ordering attacks that breach the laws of war, said Marieke de Hoon, assistant professor of international criminal law at the University of Amsterdam.

"The ICC is created to circumvent Putin's head of state immunity in foreign courts," De Hoon said. "The ICC can now continue its investigation, open cases and issue arrest warrants."

But she also noted the ICC can only put a suspect on trial in The Hague if they are arrested. The court doesn't have a police force to detain suspects and relies on international cooperation to enforce its arrest warrants. Under ICC rules, suspects can't be tried in their absence.

How armies are allowed to act during military conflicts is governed by what is known as international humanitarian law, the aim of which is to protect civilians and rein in the use of force. □

U.N. atomic watchdog: Iran further raising nuclear stockpile

By EMILY SCHULTHEIS

VIENNA (AP) — The United Nations' atomic watchdog said Thursday that it believes Iran has significantly increased its stockpile of highly enriched uranium in breach of a 2015 accord with world powers.

The International Atomic Energy Agency told member nations in its confidential quarterly report that Iran has an estimated 33.2 kilograms (73.1 pounds) of uranium enriched to up to 60% fissile purity, an increase of 15.5 kilograms since November.

Such highly enriched uranium can be easily refined to make atomic weapons, which is why world powers have sought to contain Tehran's nuclear program.

The 33.2-kilogram figure brings Iran closer to having enough weapons-grade uranium to produce a nuclear weapon.

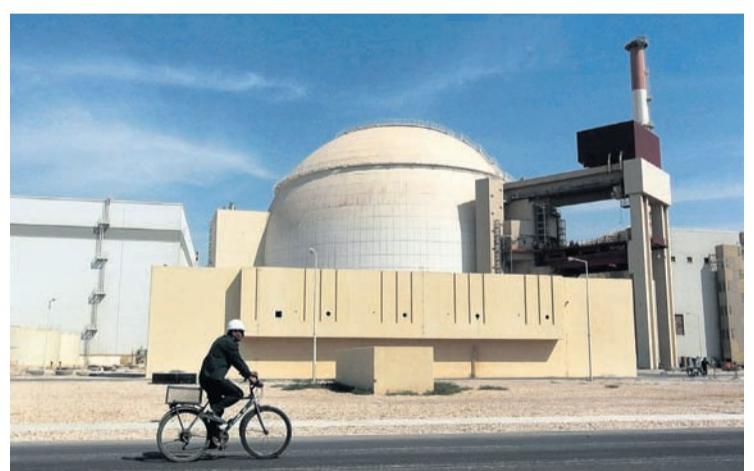
In a report to member states about its work in Iran seen by The Associated Press, IAEA estimated that as of Feb. 19, Iran's stockpile of all enriched uranium was 3197.1 kilograms, an increase of 707.4 kilograms. The Vienna-based agency said it was unable to verify the exact size of Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium due to limitations Tehran imposed on U.N. inspectors last year. IAEA's monitoring and verification activities in Iran continue to be "seriously affected" by Iran's decision to stop letting inspectors access the

agency's monitoring equipment, the report states.

Senior diplomats from Britain, China, France, Germany and Russia have been meeting with Iranian officials in Vienna since November to discuss bringing Tehran back into compliance with the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The pact eased sanctions on Iran in return for curbs on its nuclear program.

The United States pulled out of the accord under former President Donald Trump and reimposed sanctions on Iran, prompting Tehran to resume its uranium enrichment.

The IAEA announced earlier Thursday that Director General Rafael Mariano



A worker rides a bicycle in front of the reactor building of the Bushehr nuclear power plant, just outside the southern city of Bushehr, Iran, Oct. 26, 2010.

Associated Press

Grossi would travel to Tehran for meetings with senior Iranian officials on Saturday.

Asked to characterize the cooperation with Iranian

officials and whether there had been any progress, Grossi said at a Wednesday press conference in Vienna, "We are working very hard." □

U.N. refugee agency: 1 million flee Ukraine in under a week

By JAMEY KEATEN

GENEVA (AP) — The U.N. refugee agency said Thursday that 1 million people have now fled Ukraine since Russia's invasion less than a week ago, an exodus without precedent in this century for its speed. The tally from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees amounts to more than 2% of Ukraine's population — which the World Bank counted at 44 million at the end of 2020 — on the move across borders in just seven days. The agency cautions that the outflows are far from finished: It has predicted that as many as 4 million people could eventually leave Ukraine, and even that projection could be revised upward.

In an email, UNHCR spokeswoman Joung-ah Ghedini-Williams wrote, "Our data indicates we passed the 1M mark" as of midnight in central Europe, based on counts collected by national authorities.

U.N. High Commissioner Filippo Grandi said in a statement: "I have worked in refugee emergencies for almost 40 years, and rarely have I seen an exodus as rapid as this one."

"Hour by hour, minute by



A woman runs as she flees with her family across a destroyed bridge in the outskirts of Kyiv, Ukraine, Wednesday, March 2, 2022.

Associated Press

minute, more people are fleeing the terrifying reality of violence. Countless have been displaced inside the country," said Grandi, who on Thursday was visiting Ukraine neighbor Romania, which has taken in tens of thousands of refugees. "And unless there is an immediate end to the conflict, millions more are likely to be forced to flee Ukraine."

On Twitter, Grandi ap-

pealed for the "guns to fall silent" in Ukraine so humanitarian aid can reach millions more still inside the country.

Grandi's comments testified to the desperation of Ukrainians as artillery fire, exploding mortar shells and gunfire echoed across the country, and the growing concerns across the U.N. system at agencies like the World Health Organization and the U.N. Office

for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs — which launched an appeal for funds with UNHCR on Tuesday.

The day-by-day figures pointed to the dizzying speed of the evacuation: After more than 82,000 people left on the first day of the Russian invasion on Feb. 24, each day after that tallied at least 117,000 new refugees, hitting a peak of nearly 200,000 on Tuesday

alone, based on the latest UNHCR count. Some long-time staffers accustomed to dealing with refugee crises said they'd never seen anything like this exodus.

Syria, whose civil war erupted in 2011, remains the country with the largest refugee outflows — nearly 5.7 million people, according to UNHCR's figures. But even at the swiftest rate of flight out of that country, in early 2013, it took at least three months for 1 million refugees to leave Syria.

Two years later, in 2015, hundreds of thousands of Syrian and other refugees who had mostly been in Turkey fled into Europe, prompting disarray in the European Union over its response and at times skirmishes and pushbacks at some national borders.

So far, U.N. officials and others have generally praised the response from Ukraine's neighbors, who have opened homes, gymnasiums and other facilities to take in the new refugees. UNHCR spokeswoman Shabia Mantoo said Wednesday that "at this rate" the outflows from Ukraine could make it the source of "the biggest refugee crisis this century." □

China denies asking Russia not to invade until post-Olympics



Chinese President Xi Jinping, right, and Russian President Vladimir Putin talk to each other during their meeting in Beijing, Feb. 4, 2022.

Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China on Thursday denounced a report that it asked Russia to delay invading Ukraine until after the Beijing Winter Olympics as "fake news" and a "very despicable" at-

tempt to divert attention and shift blame over the conflict.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin also repeated China's accusation that Washington pro-

voked the war by not ruling out NATO membership for Ukraine.

"We hope the culprit of the crisis would reflect on their role in the Ukraine crisis, take up their responsibilities, and take practical actions to ease the situation and solve the problem instead of blaming others," Wang told reporters at a daily briefing.

The article in The New York Times cited a "Western intelligence report" considered credible by officials.

"The New York Times report is purely fake news, and such behaviors of diverting attentions and shifting blames are very despicable," Wang said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin met with his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, in Beijing on Feb. 4, hours be-

fore the Olympics opening ceremony. The two countries issued a joint statement in which they declared "friendship between the two states has no limits, there are no 'forbidden' areas of cooperation."

In the statement, China also endorsed Russia's opposition to further NATO expansion and demand that it "respect the sovereignty, security and interests of other countries." Russia, for its part, reaffirmed its support for China's claim over Taiwan, the self-governing island Beijing threatens to annex by force if necessary.

The Times said it wasn't clear whether the communication about an invasion took place between Xi and Putin or at a lower level, but that the intelligence re-

port indicated that "senior Chinese officials had some level of direct knowledge about Russia's war plans or intentions before the invasion started last week."

China is the only major government that hasn't criticized Moscow's attack on Ukraine and has also ruled out joining the United States and European governments in imposing financial sanctions on Russia.

Instead, Beijing has endorsed the Russian argument that Moscow's security was threatened by NATO's eastern expansion. China abstained in Wednesday's U.N. General Assembly emergency session vote to demand an immediate halt to Moscow's attack on Ukraine and the withdrawal of all Russian troops.

500,000 people on flood alert as rain lashes Sydney

Associated Press

SYDNEY (AP) — Around 500,000 people in Sydney and its surrounding areas had by Thursday been told to evacuate or prepare to flee floodwaters as torrential rain lashed an extraordinarily long stretch of the Australian east coast.

Rivers were rising in Australia's most populous city, home to 5 million, with New South Wales' State Emergency Services Minister Steph Cooke warning of "treacherous weather conditions" over the next 24 hours.

Australia's Bureau of Meteorology warned of life-threatening flash flooding and damaging winds with peak gusts in excess of 90 kilometers (56 miles) an hour.

Major flooding was expected along several rivers in and around Sydney.

Dozens of suburbs were on high alert.

The State Emergency Service issued evacuation orders to 200,000 residents and evacuation warnings had been sent to another 300,000.

New South Wales Premier Dominic Perrottet urged residents to take the orders seriously.

"We do believe that things



Residents look over a flooded road near Windsor on the outskirts of Sydney, Australia, Thursday, March 3, 2022.

Associated Press

will get worse before they get better," Perrottet said. Minor flood warnings were also issued for coastal communities as far as 200 kilometers (120 miles) south of Sydney.

Floodwaters were also rising in Brisbane, Australia's third-most populous city 730 kilometers (450 miles) north of Sydney, as severe thunderstorms struck.

Hailstones 5 to 6 centimeters (2 inches) wide pounded the town of Inglewood, 270 kilometers (170 miles) southwest of Brisbane, early Thursday, the Bureau of Meteorology said.

Extraordinarily heavy rain brought flash floods to the Queensland state coast 500 kilometers (310 miles) north of the capital Brisbane last week and a

south-moving low-pressure system had since brought the rain south of Sydney. The flooding has claimed 14 lives in Queensland and neighboring New South Wales since Feb. 22, when the body of a 63-year-old woman was recovered from a submerged car at Belli Park, north of Brisbane. In New South Wales, a 54-year-old man was found

Friday in a submerged SUV in Matcham, 90 kilometers (50 miles) north of Sydney. Most recently, a man in his 70s was found in his flooded apartment Wednesday in Lismore, New South Wales. Four people died in the town of 28,000.

Several Brisbane suburbs remain flooded after the river that snakes through the city center peaked on Monday.

Queensland Fire and Emergency Services Assistant Commissioner John Cawcutt said hundreds of people were calling for help in Brisbane — home to 2.6 million people — and its surrounds with heavy rain causing flash flooding.

"We've got high winds and of course we've got the potential for flash flooding because of the already sodden ground out there," Cawcutt told Nine Network television.

"Because of the saturation, creeks are rising very, very quickly — drains, stormwater areas, water is bubbling up from below ground so it's right across Brisbane," Cawcutt added.

He described the dangerous weather extending north of Brisbane and south of Sydney as an "enormous event." □

Philippines: 7 militants killed, bombs seized in recent raid

MARAWI, Philippines (AP)

— Philippine troops killed at least seven Muslim insurgents aligned with the Islamic State group in a recent offensive in the south and recovered 45 heavy firearms and several bombs and land mines that were to be used in future attacks, military officials said Thursday.

About 60 Muslim militants were in the remote camp near Maguing in Lanao del Sur province when it was attacked Tuesday by fighter jets and army forces, military officials said. It was not immediately clear whether their leader, Abu Zacariah, was among those killed or managed to escape. One soldier was killed and five others were wounded in the fighting, the officials

said. Zacariah has been implicated in past attacks and bombings and is suspected of being the newly designated leader of the Islamic State group in Southeast Asia, said army infantry brigade commander Brig. Gen. Jose Maria Cuerpo II, who oversaw Tuesday's offensive.

Two factions of the militant group Daulah Islamiyah, linked to the Islamic State group, appear to have merged and camped near Maguing in January. At the time, some power transmission towers in the region were bombed in attacks claimed by the Islamic State group, prompting the military to intensify its surveillance and prepare for an offensive, Cuerpo said. "The troops were ready to

attack but they assessed it would be difficult to storm the encampment, which was protected by heavy weapons," Cuerpo told reporters. He said that prompted him to first launch airstrikes against the insurgents.

Air force fighter jets dropped a dozen bombs, then army troops launched a ground attack and overran the camp. The insurgents fled in different directions and were pursued by troops, military officials said. The military denied reports that the troops encountered guerrillas belonging to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, the largest Muslim rebel group which signed a peace pact with the government in 2014 and is now helping govern



Lieutenant-General Alfredo Rosario, Jr., left, commander of the Western Mindanao Command, inspects a 50 cal. Browning machine gun, part of the 45 firearms seized by army troops from Muslim insurgents aligned with the Islamic State group in Marawi City, southern Philippines on Thursday Mar. 3, 2022.

Associated Press

a Muslim autonomous region in the south.

"We'd like to assure our partners in the MILF that we respect the peace ac-

cord," military spokesman Col. Ramon Zagala said. "We are on track and we're only targeting the peace spoilers." □

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ORANJESTAD — It was the official Grand Opening of Harbour House Aruba last Thursday, June 10th. The residence consisting of 94 units is located in the former Mar Azul building, right in the heart of Oranjestad. The two brothers Irwin J. Perret-Gentil and Alberto Perret-Gentil from PERING, one of the largest, private-

ly-owned Real Estate and construction firms in Venezuela and Aruba, officially opened their new jewel in the presence of the invitees.

Harbour House Aruba is the ultimate smart investment or personal living space. A state-of-the-art lobby, an ocean-view gym, bar ser-

Harbour House Aruba officially open! 80 % sold, construction in final phase: Harbour House Aruba is ready for you!

vice, rooftop with 360 degrees view of Oranjestad, on-site parking, 24-hours security and a top floor lounge area with Jacuzzi's. Cherry on the cake: an infinity pool with a panorama on the harbour.

Harbour House Aruba offers cosmopolitan living in a beach-chic environment. The residence is fast-selling their studios, two-bedroom and three-bedroom units for many reasons but in a nutshell we can name: great location, great value for your money and great quality. To see exactly what still is available you may check the website which



shows you a map with sold and open units. Updates on construction are also on forehand. When you live abroad stopping by to check upon your purchase is not that simple, yet with the monthly updates on their website, it is a lot easier.

Hottest condo in town

Aruba Today talked to one of the owners from New York: "This is going to be the hottest condo building on the island because this is the very first thing people see when they arrive here by cruise ship and it is the only one combining the ocean, port and city. We feel so happy to be the owner here, also, the organization is amazing. We are being accommodated in every way, the attention you get is extraordinary."

Boardwalk

Living here includes being part of Oranjestad and all its benefits. Around the Harbour House building a boardwalk is constructed allowing you to stroll along the waterfront and enjoy a drink on a terrace or dive into the art gallery, souvenir store or even have dinner facing the atmospheric harbour of Oranjestad. The process of purchase

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Aruba to me

ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

Complete the sentence:
Aruba to me is Send your picture with that text (including your name and where you are from) to: news@arubatoday.com.

com and we will publish your vacation memory. Isn't that a special way to keep your best moments alive? Please do note: By submitting photos, text or any other materials, you give permission to The Aruba Today Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for

promotional purposes without compensation. Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again. For today we received a lovely message from Ken Philips and Paula Philips from Rhode Island, USA,

who have been visiting our island for the past 30 years!

The wonderful couple wrote "Aruba to is coming home! We have been vacationing here for 30yrs and would not travel anywhere else. We have made numerous friends here and look forward to being together again." □



Aruba to me



ORANJESTAD - As part of our Aruba to me series, in which we invite our visitors to send their favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island, we would like to show appreciation to another of our visitors who have shared what Aruba is to them.

For today we received a wonderful message from Scott Miner from Uncasville, Connecticut

Our awesome visitor wrote "Aruba to me is total relaxation!" along with a fun and creative image of their time on our beautiful Island. □

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ORANJESTAD - Dr. Vincent Latour, a preventive youth health physician at the Department of Public Health DVG, has moved to the Netherlands to specialize as a forensic doctor for

Aruba.

This opportunity was created by the DVG thanks to the collaboration with the Ministry of General Affairs, Department of Hu-

Aruba will soon have its forensic doctor

man Resources, Family Justice Center (FJC), and the Netherlands School of Public & Occupational Health (NSPOH). After years of not having a local forensic doctor, Aruba will finally have one. The forensic doctor's duties are to assist forensic investigations in sexual abuse cases and severe relational abuse cases. It will fortify the investigation of trace evidence, but the collaboration between different entities, like the Youth and Vice Police (JZP) and the Police Department (KPA), Horacio Oduber Hospital, Guardianship Council Directorate, Department of Social Affairs, Bureau Sostenemi, Public Prosecutor, Safehouse and other partners.

Since the start of 2022, the DVG and the FJC approached the NSPOH and explored the possibilities of having an Aruban candidate specialize in forensic medicine. After the positive feedback from the NSPOH, the DVG announced the job opportunity in the local media and through Aruba-

huis. This job opportunity included the requirements and description of the tasks of a forensic doctor. In total, the DVG received four applications of which only the selected candidate met all the requirements set by the NSPOH. The NSPOH interviewed the candidate who got selected for the position. Once the DVG received the NSPOH's approval of the candidate, they submitted the official request to the council of ministers since this was a study assignment. The council of ministers approved this request following the Department of Human Resources guidelines. Dr. Latour worked in various disciplines in the Netherlands, namely multidisciplinary care in hospitals, in the family physician, and obstetrics field, before coming to Aruba. In 2016 doctor Latour moved to Aruba and started working at the JGZ as a preventive youth health physician. Doctor Latour worked at the Bureau Sostenemi

as a confidential doctor since February 2021. Before his departure to the Netherlands last Sunday, he thanked all who made this possible, particularly his wife, who encouraged him to pursue this opportunity. Dr. Latour will follow his specialization in the Netherlands for the next 30 months.

The achievement of having a local forensic doctor in Aruba is a milestone. The DVG and JGZ are aware of the need for a temporary forensic doctor in Aruba, while doctor Latour follows his specialization in the Netherlands. They are negotiating with the NSPOH to have a forensic doctor temporarily in Aruba.

The Family Justice Center is a new project where judicial entities and social aid entities will work as much as possible, together under the same roof and in some specific cases, close together. Jointly they will provide a complete service to victims of sexual and severe relational abuse. □

Local teens participate in Bootcamp at MariniersKazerneSavaneta as part of Gen297 program

Savaneta - 23 teens were dropped off at the entrance of MariniersKazerneSavaneta, our marine's barracks, with the goal of participating in a Bootcamp organized to teach our teens about the military structure and discipline.

During the 24 hours that they spent at the military base, the focus was in the fundamental values that

every member of the military forces uses in completing their tasks, namely solidarity, strength and dedication.

Since 2021, local association, AsociacionTrabao di Hubentudna Aruba (ATHA) has been hosting a program named Gen297, which is an afterschool program for every teen in secondary school. ATHA works



alongside various partners like ArubaanseMuziekschool (the Aruban school of music), Ateliers '89 (one of Aruba's renowned art schools) and KNVB, which offers the program of World Coaches.

At the end of the program at MariniersKazerne, the parents of the teens, Director of ATHA Cyndi Kelly Mathilda, Regional Manager

untee Roberto Geerman were present at the closing ceremony along with the teens. During the weekend KNVB representative Johan van Geijn, who was in Aruba on a business trip, was present during the special moment.

ATHA extends their gratitude to MariniersKazerne-Savaneta for their support to Aruba's youth and to Stanley Menzo of KNVB for the help in making the bootcamp a reality and their continued support. □



Made green upgrades in 2021? Don't miss these tax credits

By SABRINA PARYS of Nerd-Wallet

have woven green practices into their everyday lives — from recycling to going paperless and even cutting back on meat consumption.

Switching to clean energy or purchasing an electric vehicle are additional ways to go green, but large-scale upgrades also often come with major price tags. Several existing tax credits can help to offset the cost of the commitment — but it pays to know the details.

Whether you're looking to make some upgrades this year or are wondering if any changes you made in 2021 count toward a tax discount, here's a quick-start guide to the current federal tax incentives for energy efficiency and other green upgrades.

PLUG-IN ELECTRIC CAR CREDIT

Upgrading to an electric vehicle comes with a few feel-good benefits. Apart from lowering your carbon footprint, electric vehicles often require less maintenance and cost less to fuel than their gas-powered counterparts.

Your purchase might even count toward a federal tax credit of up to \$7,500. The



In this photo made on Thursday, May 6, 2021, a 2021 Ford Mustang Mach E is seen as it is charging at a Ford dealer in Wexford, Pa.

Associated Press

catch? You'll need to keep an eye on which vehicles qualify and for how much.

"What you'll find is that high-performing fully electric vehicles get the full benefit of the credit," says Shannon Christensen, an attorney and editor for Thomson Reuters Tax and Accounting based in Lindstrom, Minnesota. Hybrid models, on the other hand, often qualify for a smaller sum.

Here's a glance at some of

the fine print:

- The credit is worth \$2,500 to \$7,500, depending on the car's battery capacity.
- Credits are reduced and eventually phase out after a manufacturer sells 200,000 qualifying vehicles.
- You must own the car. Used or leased cars don't qualify.
- The car must weigh less than 14,000 pounds.
- The credit is nonrefundable; it can lower your tax

bill to zero, but it won't result in a refund.

Don't forget to look for additional incentives on the state and local level, says Gena Jones, an attorney and certified public accountant based in Flossmoor, Illinois. California's Clean Air Vehicle program, for example, grants carpool lane access to select electric vehicles. New Yorkers, on the other hand, might be eligible for a

state-level rebate of up to \$2,000 on top of the federal tax credit.

RESIDENTIAL ENERGY CREDITS

Green tax credits for the home come in two buckets: one for renewable energy systems and another for energy efficiency.

Taxpayers who upgrade to renewable energy systems for their homes, such as solar panels or geothermal heat pumps, may be eligible for a nonrefundable tax credit of up to 26% of the costs for systems installed in 2020 through 2022. After that, the percentage goes down to 22% for systems installed in 2023.

Switching to an alternative energy system could also help you save on utilities and even increase the value of your home.

But note that certain subsidies — like, say, a kickback check you receive from a utility company — should be included as income when you file your return, says Christensen. Otherwise, you'll need to subtract the check amount from the total costs you're claiming before you calculate your credit. If you're wondering about smaller commitment changes, the IRS also offers some relief there. □

Amazon shuttering its physical bookstores and 4-star shops

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO

AP Retail Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Amazon is closing all of its brick-and-mortar bookstores, as well as its 4-star shops and pop up locations, as the online retail behemoth reworks its physical footprint. The Seattle-based company said Wednesday that the move, which affects 66 stores in the U.S. and two in the United Kingdom, will enable it to concentrate its efforts on Amazon Fresh, Whole Foods Market, its convenience concept called Amazon Go and its upcoming Amazon Style stores. Amazon Style, which will sell fashion and accessories, is set to open in a Southern California mall later this year.

"We remain committed to

building great, long-term physical retail experiences and technologies and we're working closely with our affected employees to help them find new roles within Amazon," the company said in a statement. It couldn't be learned immediately how many Amazon workers are being affected.

Amazon opened its first brick-and-mortar bookstore in 2015, two decades after it began selling books online and helped drive a number of shops out of business. Amazon's 4-star shops, which first made their debut in 2018, carry a limited selection of best-selling products from top categories that Amazon.com sells, including devices, consumer electronics,

toys and games.

The move comes as Amazon.com Inc.'s overall revenue growth is slowing, and it's looking for new ways to reignite sales.

Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData Retail, said the strategy comes as a surprise. He said he believes it's an acknowledgement that the bookstores weren't delivering the returns Amazon was looking for.

Saunders said he thinks the main problem with Amazon's non-food stores is that they lacked a real purpose even though the merchandise was well-presented.

"They were designed for people to pop in and browse rather than as destinations where people



Customers buy a bag of books at an Amazon Books store, Nov. 20, 2017, in New York.

Associated Press

would head on a mission to buy something," he wrote in a note on Wednesday. He noted that ultimately that wasn't good for driving customer traffic, especially in an era where people are visiting shops less.

Saunders added that the other problem is the assortment which, in many locations, was disjoined and unfocused.

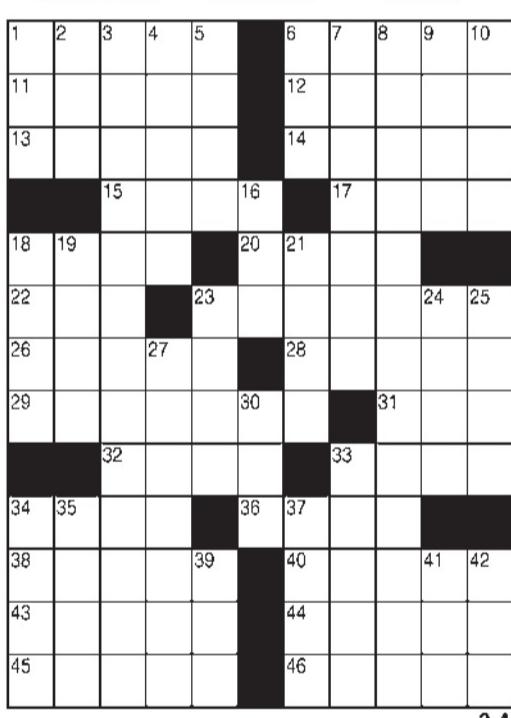
The news of the closure was first reported by Reuters. □

CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Yoda's creator
6 Boosts
11 Sluggish
12 Skate-boarding jump
13 Evade
14 First American in orbit
15 Theater units
17 Small statue
18 Quarter, e.g.
20 Brace
22 Bow's shape
23 Bill stamp
26 Tennis star Rafael
28 Wails
29 Deli machines
31 Pert talk
32 Overcast
33 Singer Perry
34 Bobsled's kin
36 Sweeping tale
38 Cheering wildly
40 How tuna may be packed
43 Septem-ber sign
44 Draw out

**Yesterday's answer**

3-4

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is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

3-4

CRYPTOQUOTE

UL JNYR MQA VMYFMSUTQ MKN
ST BTION, SJNG BMQ TQYG BTION
LKTO SJN BJUYAKNQ, LTK SJN
BJUYAKNQ MKN SJN OMDNKV TL
ONQ. — OMKUM OTQSNVVTKU
Yesterday's Cryptoquote: NEXT TO
ENTERTAINING OR IMPRESSIVE TALK, A
THOROUGH-GOING SILENCE MANAGES TO
INTRIGUE MOST PEOPLE. — FLORENCE J.
HARRIMAN

6 ways technology is evolving travel in 2022



Travelers use the self-service kiosk to check in and pay for luggage at the American Airlines terminal, Thursday, April 29, 2021, in Miami.

Associated Press

By SALLY FRENCH of Nerd-Wallet

For the athletes at the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, travel entailed ... robots. Everywhere. These machines prepared and served noodles, rice and burgers, and roamed hallways to take the temperatures of passersby. They even passed the Olympic flame underwater. Yet even if you're not an Olympian, your travels these days are far more likely to involve technology that you've never used before.

Many of these technological advancements were spurred by early pandemic pressure for contactless payments, food service and more. For example, between February and March 2020 alone, Mastercard saw the number of contactless payments at grocery stores grow twice as fast as non-contactless transactions. Meanwhile, the number of active restaurants on the Uber Eats food delivery app grew by over 75% between Dec. 31, 2019, and Dec. 31, 2020. So whether you found the Olympic robots creepy or

cool, technology is seeping into travel in a way that most travelers are finding enormously beneficial.

Whether shortening queues, helping travelers save money or eliminating the need to get within six feet of others, here are some of the top travel technology evolutions in 2022.

1. APPS FOR BOOKING HOTELS — AND PICKING YOUR ROOM

Most large hotel chains have long had free apps with features like booking and live chat, but many recently got big-time improvements.

Last summer, Hilton launched a feature that lets you book and instantly confirm connecting rooms on its app and website, which has proven especially helpful for groups.

Its app also can display a map of the hotel and allow you to select your exact room of choice, whether it's the peaceful room farthest from the elevator or the one nearby for easy access.

2. SMART DEVICES AS DIGITAL ROOM KEYS

Over at Hilton, which has offered digital keys to some degree since 2015, last year saw a huge update in Digital Key Share, which allows more than one guest to have digital access. The feature is currently available at about 80% of Hilton's hotels worldwide.

3. THE RISE OF VIRTUAL QUEUES

In January, Clear, a private biometric screening company that lets paying members bypass certain security lines at busy areas including stadiums and airports, announced that it had acquired another company designed to reduce wait times — Whyline. The acquisition could allow Clear to improve virtual queues for processes like checking vaccine status or accessing airport lounges.

Meanwhile, Disney rolled out a feature in its U.S. theme park apps last October called Genie, which is intended to help vacationers better plan their day. By analyzing current lines and crowds, it can suggest more efficient itineraries.

4. DELIVERY APPS TO REPLACE ROOM SERVICE

Food delivery apps have been disrupting room service lately by delivering food from around town — and eliminating the need to pay \$10 for a bowl of room service cereal.

Hotels are leaning into the idea of letting other companies handle it. □

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U.N. countries to create treaty to fight plastic pollution



Joyce Njeri, 8, carries a torn sack holding the plastic bottles she has scavenged, as she walks amidst garbage and plastic bags at the garbage dump in the Dandora slum of Nairobi, Kenya on Nov. 12, 2015.

Associated Press

**By WANJOHI KABUKURU
NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) —**

United Nations countries have agreed to create a legally binding global treaty to address plastic pollution in the world's oceans, rivers and landscape.

The U.N. Environment Assembly voted unanimously Wednesday at its meeting in Kenya's capital Nairobi for a resolution "to end plastic pollution."

It sets the stage for international negotiations de-

signed to produce a treaty by 2024.

"Today we wrote history. Plastic pollution has grown into an epidemic," said Espen Barth Eide, Norway's minister for environment and climate and the assembly's president. "With today's resolution we are officially on track for a cure." After a week of debate, negotiators fashioned proposals — one by Peru and Rwanda and others by India and Japan — into

a framework for a global approach to prevent and reduce plastic pollution, including marine litter.

The treaty would cover the full lifecycle of plastics, including production, design and disposal.

"It is not always you get such a major environment deal," Inger Andersen, executive director of the U.N. Environment Program, told a news conference. Anderson called the endorsement by representatives of 175 member countries "the most significant global environmental governance decision since the Paris (Climate) Agreement in 2015."

According to a recent Pew study, the global plastic industry is valued at \$522.6 billion and 11 million metric tons of plastic end up in the oceans every year.

The environmental group Greenpeace said the U.N. panel's decision is a "big, bold step to end plastic pollution." □

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In 'Lucy and Desi,' Amy Poehler strives to humanize TV icons

By LINDSEY BAHR

For Amy Poehler and millions of millions of Americans, "I Love Lucy" wasn't just something that was on television. It was a show that "came with your TV and was on your whole life," she said.

But it's also one that, in the 65 years since it ended, loomed so large as a defining pillar of sitcom comedy that it and the vibrant couple behind the show have been flattened under the weight of words like "icon" and "trailblazer." It's why Poehler was especially excited to dive into the world of Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz for the new documentary "Lucy and Desi" (streaming on Amazon Prime Video on Friday) and bring them back to earth.

"One of my goals was to really make it feel like we were seeing them again as human people," Poehler said. "As nuanced and complex thinkers as we think we are, sometimes our brains need to be reminded that the little people that were on a black-and-white show on our TV were actual flesh and blood people who had wants and needs like everyone else."

The doc explores their unlikely ascent to Hollywood moguldom as well as their fascinating relationship on screen and off. She was a girl from Jamestown, New York, who saw modeling and acting as a way



This image released by Amazon shows Lucille Ball, left, and Desi Arnaz in a photo from the documentary "Lucy and Desi."

Associated Press

out and he was a child of wealth and privilege whose life was upended during the Cuban revolution in 1933, when he and his family fled to America and had to start from scratch.

"I think one of the coolest things about this story is you have two genuine outsiders: You have a Cuban-American immigrant, a refugee, if you will, who arrived to the country with no money and a poor grasp of the language. And then you have a woman in her 40s who's been working in the business for a long time and is very skilled, but certainly hasn't reached the amount of power that

she'd like," Poehler said. "And it's these two people, very confident in their skills but not gatekeepers in any way, who take over the business."

In one particularly powerful sequence, Ball is shown reporting the \$20 million earnings of their studio, Desilu, which had just greenlit "Star Trek" and "Mission: Impossible."

"Lucy had a reluctance to be considered the first woman anything, but she was the first woman to run a giant studio," Poehler said. "She was directing and writing and producing and but she was a (product) of the time and wouldn't have

assumed to take credit for any of those things."

Poehler tried to be especially thoughtful about selecting her talking heads, which include Norman Lear, Bette Midler and Carol Burnett. She didn't want to simply collect famous people, she wanted voices who weren't Arnaz and Ball to have had a more direct connection to them, including their children, Lucie Arnaz and Desi Arnaz Jr., and the children of those who worked on the show, or a perspective that would deepen the narrative. Cuban playwright Eduardo Machado puts into perspective the import

of seeing a man like Desi Arnaz on television and in charge.

A treasure trove of previously unreleased personal recordings and interviews found at their daughter's Palm Springs home proved vital for letting Ball and Arnaz tell their own stories. Lucie Arnaz was more than happy to hand them over to Poehler, who she thought the perfect person to be the shepherd of her parents' story.

"One of the things that was really important to me is that we heard from Lucy and Desi as much as we could," Poehler said. "It's very interesting to hear people talk about their lives, even if they're an unreliable narrator."

The doc should satisfy superfans, but Poehler also made it for the merely curious too.

"There could be so many different approaches to their story because they represented so many things, whether they wanted to or not, they represented a changing business, they represented a changing America," Poehler said. "What I found so fascinating is the way both respected and loved each other's process up until the very end. They really brought out the best in each other."

It's one of two high profile Hollywood projects about the power couple. □

Lady Gaga among co-hosts for Elton John's Oscar party



Sir Elton John performs at Madison Square Garden during his Farewell Yellow Brick Road Tour on Tuesday, Feb. 22, 2022, in New York.

Associated Press

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Lady

Gaga, Billy Porter and "Will & Grace" star Eric McCormack will join Elton John to co-host the superstar's charity Oscar watch party. It is the 30th year the singer has hosted a viewing party to raise money for his Elton John AIDS Foundation. This year's event marks a return to an in-person gathering after last year's party was held online due to the pandemic.

The watch party, which will coincide with the Academy Awards being held in Los Angeles on March 27, has raised more than \$86 million to date, organizers

said.

Singer-songwriter Brandi Carlile will perform during the event.

Porter is the Emmy-winning star of "Pose," a show that ended its four season run on FX last year. He and Gaga have both attended the Oscars in recent years, wearing stunning looks on the red carpet. McCormack won an Emmy playing Will on NBC's "Will & Grace" during its original run in the early 2000s and starred in its recent revival.

"Lady Gaga, Billy Porter and Eric McCormack are not only amazingly talented,

but have greatly contributed to LGBTQ+ visibility and inclusion in entertainment – both on screen and in music," said co-host David Furnish, who is the foundation's chairman and John's husband. "I'm honored to have this group to join me on stage in West Hollywood Park to advocate for all marginalized groups affected by HIV."

The foundation fights discrimination against those with AIDS and has programs to provide treatment, prevent infections and lobby governments for programs that help those with HIV. □

Canelo Álvarez picks Bivol, Golovkin for next 2 fights

By GREG BEACHAM

AP Sports Writer

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Canelo Álvarez has chosen the next series of challenges for himself atop the boxing world.

And as usual for the Mexican pound-for-pound superstar, he's charting a path with his legacy in mind.

The undisputed super middleweight world champion will move up to light heavyweight for the second time on May 7 to take on WBA champion Dmitry Bivol (19-0, 11 KOs) in Las Vegas.

If Álvarez (57-1-2, 39 KOs) wins, and if Gennady Golovkin beats Ryota Murata in Japan in April, Álvarez and Golovkin will complete their highly entertaining trilogy in the late summer or early fall.

"For me, it's to continue to make history, right?" Álvarez said Wednesday as he opened promotion of his showdown with Bivol, slated for T-Mobile Arena. "I like the idea to go to 175 and fight (Bivol), the second-best fighter in that division, the champion. That's a good challenge for me."

Álvarez also intends to take a third fight in December, likely against either a cruiserweight champion or a super middleweight mandatory challenger. It all adds up to another busy year for boxing's most bankable star, one whose work ethic hasn't flagged with his increasing fame and fortune.

"I like to be busy," said Álvarez, who fought four times



Canelo Alvarez, second from left, of Mexico, poses with Dmitry Bivol, right, of Russia, Wednesday, March 2, 2022, in San Diego as promoter Eddie Hearn, second from right, and Alvarez's trainer, Eddy Reynoso, left, look on.

Associated Press

in 11 months while claiming all four 168-pound belts last year. "I feel I'm in my prime. I feel more confident in everything, more strong, so I don't know if it's because I'm more active or not, but I like to be in the ring."

He will have significant height and size disadvantages against Bivol, but that's all part of the challenge to Álvarez, who stopped Sergey Kovalev in his only previous light heavyweight bout in 2019. After blasting through every 168-pound belt-holder last year, he decided not to take another fight at super middleweight against the likes of two-time champion David Benavidez or middleweight star Jermall Charlo, who would both love the

payday guaranteed by sharing a ring with Álvarez. "I know I'm the best fighter, but I fought the best fighters in the division, and I beat everybody at 168," Álvarez said. "You still say, 'No, but you need to fight ...' Why? I don't understand that. But right now, I can do whatever I want, and I just do the best things and I fight with the best, with the champions. ... (Bivol) has something to offer me. He's a world champion at 175. He's a better fighter than (Charlo or Benavidez)."

Álvarez will go back down to 168 pounds to fight Golovkin, who battled him to a draw in their first bout before Álvarez got a narrow decision in the second matchup. Álvarez had

been notably reluctant to accept a third fight with the Kazakh middleweight star, claiming a personal grudge against him, but streaming service DAZN has been eager for Álvarez to take the most marketable bout possible for both fighters.

Álvarez began promotion of his showdown with Bivol in San Diego, where he lives and trains and plays 18 holes of golf almost every day of the year. He rolled up to the tent outside the harborside hotel in a black-and-blue Bugatti Chiron, and he briefly delayed his first interview session to answer texts from his wife. Don't let Álvarez's comfortable American life fool anyone, though. He remains

an inveterate gym rat who stays sharp constantly with trainer Eddy Reynoso, and he is returning to training camp just four months after he beat Caleb Plant last November to complete his busy 2021.

"He's set the bar," said Eddie Hearn, one of Álvarez's promoters. "Normally the excuse for big stars is, 'They only fight twice a year.' Well, he's just fought four times. I do think other stars ought to be more active, and he's setting the example."

Bivol has his own concerns as a Russian athlete put in a painful position by the invasion of Ukraine.

Bivol was born in Kyrgyzstan, but his parents moved to St. Petersburg when he was 11 years old. His wife, children and family are still in Russia while he prepares to train for this bout in the U.S.

"I have a lot of friends in Ukraine," Bivol said. "I have a lot of friends in Russia. My family is in Russia. I have a lot of friends everywhere, and I wish them only peace and only the best. It's really sad for me. Every day I wake up and read the news and I hope it will stop." Bivol and Hearn both said they expect the bout to be held as scheduled, while realizing the world could change dramatically in two months. The four major sanctioning bodies in boxing haven't yet attempted to stop Russian fighters from competing, but have refused to sanction title fights in Russia. □

Red Bull extend F1 champ Verstappen's contract through 2028

LONDON (AP) — Formula One champion Max Verstappen has signed a new deal that keeps him at Red Bull to 2028.

The 24-year-old Verstappen was rewarded on Thursday for beating Lewis Hamilton to win his first world championship last year, with another five years added on the contract that ran through 2023. "Choosing to stay to the 2028 season was an

easy decision," the Dutchman said in a statement. "I love this team and last year was simply incredible. Our goal since we came together in 2016 was to win the championship and we have done that, so now it's about keeping the number one on the car long-term." Verstappen, who made his F1 debut at the age of 17, will open his title defense in Bahrain on March 20.

"Our immediate focus is on retaining Max's world championship title, but this deal also shows he is a part of the team's long-term planning," team principal Christian Horner said.

"With the Red Bull Powertrains division working towards the new engine regulations for 2026 we wanted to make sure we had the best driver on the grid secured for that car." □



Red Bull driver Max Verstappen of the Netherlands walks through a corridor during a Formula One pre-season testing session at the Catalunya racetrack in Montmelo, just outside of Barcelona, Spain, Thursday, Feb. 24, 2022.

Associated Press

Don't come back until baseball has been made better

By TIM DAHLBERG
AP Sports Columnist

The talks are over, at least for now. Opening day is gone, too, and now we're forced to wait to see if we get any baseball at all.

If there was any good news coming out of baseball's labor talks in Florida it was this: At least now we know who to blame.

Here's a hint: It's not anyone wearing a uniform.

No, baseball players aren't blameless in any of this, far from it. They keep wanting more when they historically have always had the best deals in all of professional sports.

But this one is mostly on the 30 miserable, conniving owners who have always cared more about squeezing every last dollar out of the game than they ever cared about the game itself.

Once again, they've stolen from baseball fans. This time they made off with opening day and at least six games out of the regular season.

Sadly, that may just be the beginning. The temperatures could easily hit 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 degrees Celsius) in Arizona by the time spring training begins, if it ever does.

For what purpose, it's hard to figure out. Yes, the play-



Baseball fans watch as Major League Baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred speaks during a news conference after negotiations with the players' association toward a labor deal, Tuesday, March 1, 2022, at Roger Dean Stadium in Jupiter, Fla.

Associated Press

ers' union can be demanding and is prone to asking for far more than owners are willing to deliver.

But the issues weren't so complex they couldn't be solved with some more time at the table. And the truth is, there was nothing on that table that would tilt the playing field so badly that franchises around the country would start bleeding money.

It's almost like the owners didn't want the season to start on time — and maybe

they really didn't. Outside of opening day, early season games are not generally moneymakers for owners despite Commissioner Rob Manfred's contention that missing the games would be a tragedy for baseball. For weeks, owners refused to negotiate at all. When they finally did, it was with warnings of missed games and salaries and, finally, an ultimatum that opening day would be scratched if players didn't agree to a last and best offer.

Afterward, they cried poor, as if anyone believed them. "The last five years have been very difficult years from a revenue perspective for the industry given the pandemic," Manfred said.

They've been difficult for baseball fans, too, though that's another story. The fact that fans are fleeing the game isn't all economic, but they've certainly grown weary of paying \$75 for a mediocre seat, \$25 for parking and \$18 plus

tip every time the beer guy comes down the aisle.

No one should feel sorry for baseball players, either, who make an average of \$4 million a year to play a child's game. Indeed, the argument advanced by the union that they are bargaining for a system where all teams are competitive is simply a smokescreen for higher payrolls on smaller market clubs.

But salaries that once seemed to have no ceiling in the past have slipped a bit in the last few years — a trend players want reversed. That's largely because front offices now use analytics to figure out value and teams know that — except for a few superstars — players are pretty much exchangeable.

No reason to pay a veteran reliever \$15 million a year when teams can bring in young fireballers at a fraction of the price to replace them without skipping a beat.

"The game has suffered damage for a while now. ... The game has been manipulated," union chief Tony Clark said. "The value inherent and how players are respected and viewed has changed. Players have been commoditized, monetized in a way that is really hard to explain." □

NFL suspends all COVID protocols, cites 'encouraging trends'



Carolina Panthers defensive end Brian Burns (53) wears a mask as he warms up before an NFL football game against the New Orleans Saints in New Orleans, Sunday, Jan. 2, 2022.

Associated Press

By BARRY WILNER
AP Pro Football Writer
The NFL has suspended all aspects of its COVID-19 protocols, citing recent trends

showing that the spread of the coronavirus is declining. In an agreement with the players' association, the league sent a memo to the

32 teams Thursday in which it mentioned "encouraging trends regarding the prevalence and severity of COVID-19, the evolving guidance from the CDC, changes to state law and the counsel of our respective experts" as reasons for the move.

Should the NFL find reasons to reimpose any aspects of the protocols, it will do so in conjunction with the NFL Players Association.

Teams are required to remain in compliance with state and local laws and may continue "reasonable measures to protect their staff and players," said the memo obtained by The Associated Press. Regardless of vaccination

status, players and staff no longer must wear face coverings at team facilities, though each club can require it individually. Social distancing signs no longer are required as well.

The league eliminated mandatory testing of players and staff, regardless of vaccination status. Testing will occur only when clinically indicated or at the direction of a team physician.

But each team must have a facility to accommodate anyone who reports symptoms that require testing. Weight room restrictions, including capacity limits, have been dropped, though each team can impose its own rules for weight

room usage. Contact tracing devices have not been required since Jan. 3, and the service is being discontinued. The league is encouraging everyone to continue monitoring for symptoms of COVID-19 on a daily basis before entering the team facility. Any individual who tests positive must isolate for five days after the positive test.

No NFL games were canceled during the past two seasons because of the pandemic, though many were moved during the 2020 schedule. About 95% of the players and nearly 100% of team personnel were vaccinated, the league reported. □